The Truro Comprehensive Plan Overview

Prepared by the
Truro Local
Planning Committee

with consulting
assistance from

The LandUse Collaborative

July 1994

Plan Overview

Truro is one of the most unusual towns in the Commonwealth: it is rural with great expanses of open land and vistas, it is on the coast, and it has the potential to remain rural forever. Few towns can say this. This combination of assets will continue to make Truro a tourism gem for decades to come. That same appeal will also generate more housing development, but if the siting, design and landscaping of those new homes are handled sensitively, Truro will retain its character and not become another overdeveloped seaside community.

The key to managing this future housing development will be to always ensure that the natural environment is more noticeable and predominant than the developed environment. While this may sound simplistic, it is critical: trees, shrubs, small meadows, views of the ocean and views of the river must be maintained and protected. Homes must be set within vegetation and more vegetation must be planted around new homes. Roads must remain narrow, tree shrouded and winding; traffic speeds must remain low. If homes are vacant of scrubby Cape Cod vegetation and the natural wildness of Truro, or if wide new subdivision roads begin to characterize new development, Truro's rural visual character will be damaged.

To address this rural protection issue, the Plan recommends that local design guidelines – not regulations – be prepared. A handbook with recommended design standards should be distributed to all homeowners and developers. In addition, all development projects should complete an assessment of the degree to which their projects support, are neutral toward or negatively impact the

goals and policies of this Comprehensive Plan. Along with strengthened commercial site design standards and the gradual experimentation with historic districts in neighborhoods that seek such protection, these combined efforts should encourage all property owners to respect the rural and seaside character of Truro. If these methods do not work in the years ahead, the Town may consider using powers of greater regulation that are within the Cape Cod Commission Act. There is too much at stake to allow insensitive developers or homeowners to spoil what can be a unique environment that will be available for our grandchildren's grandchildren.

This protection of rural character is the theme that runs throughout Truro's Comprehensive Plan, as indicated in each of the Plan's elements, and discussed below.

The overriding finding from the land use inventory and analysis is that Truro has the capacity to almost double its number of housing units by buildout. If the current 1:2 ratio of year-round to seasonal homes remains the same, then this will mean the Town will have approximately 1500 year-round families living in the community within 30 to 50 years. Along with those families will come the expenses of schools and services. If the ratio remains the same, the Town will also gain many second homes with high values, low service demands and thus high net tax revenues to the town.

An analysis of the remaining buildable land indicates that much of Truro's vacant land base has already been subdivided and therefore, many of the lots that will one day hold houses have already been created. These lots are immune to any lot size changes the Town might consider. Thus, to a large extent, Truro will not be able to greatly influence the number of housing units that will eventually be built in the community and therefore, the Plan does not recommend changing lot sizes.

Another important finding is that there are relatively few remaining vacant commercially zoned properties left in Truro. There are no large vacant business zoned properties at Beach Point that could hold a business and the required parking. In all, there are five vacant parcels totaling seven acres that are zoned for general business use. All of these lie on Route 6. Given that Route 6 is Truro's "Main Street", strengthened site design standards are recommended, but it is also recommended that such standards be developed with the full cooperation of the business community so that onerous burdens are not placed on Truro's small business sector. All in all, Truro's character will not change greatly from future commercial development and good design will only serve to enhance the rural, "get away from it all" atmosphere of the Town.

When the demands that this growth will place on the Town were compared with the capacity of existing and planned services and facilities, the findings indicated that Truro is well prepared to handle this growth in most respects. Police, fire, safety, highway and Town administration all are either at adequate levels or will be when planned improvements are completed. School facilities will be strained, the village centers and beach parking areas will see an increase in congestion and more open space will be lost in the community. As a result, the Plan recommends that the Town consider temporary school building solutions to deal with a short term elementary school population increase, that the Town identify that in 5 to 10 years, a school building addition or new structure should begin to be planned, that village parking and circulation be improved and that satellite beach parking be created for the Town's ocean beaches.

Truro has a wonderful natural resource base that is largely protected by the National Seashore. With over 70% of the total area in the town lying within the Seashore boundaries, the vernal pools, ponds, much of the Pamet River and all of the ocean beaches and dunes are protected from development. This is an enviable situation and many rural towns would gladly change places with Truro. Without the Seashore, Truro would be developed at densities similar to much of the Upper Cape and would carry similar fiscal burdens from that development.

The major challenges emerging from the natural resource inventory and analysis are ensuring for an adequate and high quality public water supply for the region, the implementation of the Harbor Management Plan, a strengthened water quality testing program for the Pamet watershed, and the need to encourage all development projects to consider the range of impacts their projects may impose on the environment. While the Plan does not envision great environmental threats from future development given the Town's zoning, its Board of Health regulations and the presence of the Seashore, the absence of some tools – such as a local wetlands bylaw – do leave open the potential for greater incremental damage than would occur otherwise. As the only Town on the Cape not having a wetlands bylaw and thus having no means to site housing at the now recognized necessary greater distances from wetlands than are required in the Wetlands Act, Truro is needlessly allowing a weak link in its environmental regulations to weaken its overall environmental protection effort.

The emphasis of the findings from the economic development analysis is that while Truro will always be a place of small business and while most people will not be able to find a job in Truro, there is much that a cooperative effort between the Town and the private sector can do to strengthen the Town's

economy. The future use of the North Truro Air Force Base offers an example of how many aspects of the Town's needs can be woven into one project. Environmental education facilities, cultural activities, some housing and crafts/artisan economic activity are all compatible at this site. Working in cooperation with the National Park Service, regional not-for-profits and the private sector, the Town has a once in a lifetime opportunity to create a new activity center within its borders that can meet many objectives. The Plan recommends that the Town actively shape this project.

Beach Point is a critical part of the local economy; it generates a large portion of the Town 's tax revenue and it lodges most of the Town's visitors. It also lies on a fragile piece of land. Further development should be managed carefully so as to maintain bay and lake views, and to reduce parking and traffic congestion

In addition, the Truro Partnership for Economic Development, under the auspices of the Board of Selectmen, is encouraged to develop specific marketing and promotion strategies for North Truro and Truro Center. There are many cars that travel Route 6 that never stop in Truro's villages. More aggressive marketing, and some village circulation improvements can help to increase the flow of customers to Truro's businesses.

There are several sites in Town that offer the potential for meeting future needs. The facilities element identified the need for a senior center and a library, and the Town also has no common or other outside gathering space. Satellite beach parking will also be needed to protect the Town's ocean beaches' dunes, to alleviate beach road traffic and to allow all locals to find parking spaces. Potential long range concepts presented in this Plan include moving the Highway Department to the Transfer Station and locating one beach parking lot at that site. The Town Hall Hill area should be considered for elderly housing and/or a senior center. This will be compatible with the improvements planned for the Town Hall. There will also be adequate space for a small common and gathering area.

Along a similar vein, the Truro Center Post Office area is recommended for some design changes. Traffic movement must be made clearer; parking areas must be better defined. The Plan recommends that a group of business people and other citizens work to think through a variety of options for better using and improving the economic viability of this focal point.

A major question going into the preparation of this Plan was, "What position should Truro take regarding the potential future need to make significant improvements to Route 6 in order to handle higher summer traffic levels?". Following our analysis, we recommend that no major structural improvements be

made to Route 6. It has adequate capacity to handle all off-peak travel levels (non-Saturday levels) through to buildout. In terms of peak hour traffic, it is Truro's position that given the limitations on further growth in Provincetown and at the Seashore and therefore the limited long term growth demand that will be placed on the roadway, the best way to manage traffic on Route 6 is through a careful strategy that avoids road-widening techniques. The Plan recommends that police officers continue to direct traffic during peak periods, and that satellite beach parking be built to reduce the number of trips on local roads.

While Truro has 70% of its land area protected as a park forever, there will be increasing demands for active recreation space such as playgrounds and ballfields. Again, the North Truro Air Force Base could meet some of these needs.

Truro's affordable housing problems are few in number, but severe for those who cannot find housing that fits their budget. To meet state requirements of having 10% of our housing stock subsidized would require that we have 70 affordable units today and eventually 150 affordable units. While some towns with many larger subdivisions yet to be planned can rely on requiring that affordable units be provided with each new development, the degree of existing subdivision in our Town means that this path will yield few results for the effort. Instead, we will seek to build Housing Authority managed units, and we will attempt to build affordable houses on existing lots throughout Town. While we will work to meet the 10% goal, with our limited resources it will be difficult.

Given the importance of the National Seashore to Truro's character and its future, there is a short separate element for the Seashore. The primary recommendations are for continued cooperation on parking, water supply arrangements, the Air Force Base and on joint shoulder season promotion efforts that emphasize the environmental uniqueness of Truro.

The final element is community character and historic preservation. Given the dispersed nature of many of Truro's historic resources and the reservation that many Truro residents have toward increased government regulation, the Plan recommends a "go slow" approach with historic districts. Neighborhoods that show an interest in a historic district should be encouraged and as time passes the community will be able to better evaluate whether more widespread use of these planning tools makes good sense for Truro. Absent these tools, the Plan sees few dramatic threats to the Town's historic resources if the Cape Cod Lighthouse can be saved.

The greatest threat the Town faces relates to residential development Truro's community character will erode if typical suburban housing development is the norm for the next twenty years. As detailed above, elevating the natural environment in every future building project will be the key to protecting the Town's community character.

During the course of the three year period required to prepare this Plan, over 200 people participated in workshops and meetings, over a third of the Town's households responded to our citizen survey, and over 1500 volunteer hours were invested. The Plan has served several purposes for this Town: it has clarified what is a threat to our future and what is not likely to be a threat; and it has provided a forum for all Truro residents to exchange ideas and reaffirm the qualities of this community that make it special to all of us. Finally, it has also given us a balanced, tailor-made strategy to reach our objectives.

Implementing this Plan will not take large amounts of money, nor will it require enlarging or complicating our Town government. A central principle of this Plan is for our community to remain rural and for us to keep government costs to the necessary minimum.

What will be required, however, will be an ongoing commitment to refer to this blueprint and to encourage open debate when citizens feel that landowners or elected officials are acting in contradiction to the principles expressed by this Plan.

Use and Interpretation of the Comprehensive Plan

The Truro Comprehensive Plan is the Town of Truro's official documentation and statement of land use and growth policy. The goals and policies of this document may be used to defend or promote official Town positions regarding land use and growth. The existence of this Plan now gives Truro additional standing before the Cape Cod Commission concerning its positions and decision making rationales regarding land use and growth management issues. In other words, a decision based on the Plan is more defensible than one that contradicts the Plan.

This Plan allows the Town of Truro to enter into development agreements with landowners as a way of tailor-making project standards at a more refined level than in zoning. This can be advantageous for both the Town and the landowner. The Plan also allows the Town to adopt impact fees, which would allow the Town to assess to a developer the costs that can be directly attributable to his or her development.

The Town of Truro will bring its local bylaws and regulations into consistency with the Local Comprehensive Plan within two years of adoption of the Plan. Beyond this action, however, due to the changing nature of the Town's financial ability to respond to land use and growth change and the long term nature of this Comprehensive Plan, the other non-regulatory actions recommended by this Plan are advisory only. The Town shall not be held liable for not performing said actions or for adjusting implementation schedules as needed to accommodate changing circumstances.

In situations where there appear to be contradictions between the Truro Comprehensive Plan and Truro bylaws and regulations, the bylaws and regulations, as adopted by the Town shall take precedence. The Comprehensive Plan shall provide guidance for the amendment of said bylaws and regulations, but it shall not supersede those bylaws and regulations.

The Truro Comprehensive Plan may be amended by a majority vote of Town Meeting. The Comprehensive Plan shall be reviewed and updated every five years.

What are the People of Truro Looking for in the Future?

The Truro Community Survey

The Truro Community Survey was prepared and mailed in 1992. Results were analyzed in early 1993. A total of 2300 households were mailed to and 666 responses (25%) were received. This is a very good figure for community surveys, and while the survey was not performed in a manner that would allow statistical extrapolations to the entire population, the size of the response allowed the Town to understand how a large portion of the population feels about a variety of issues.

The primary bias of the survey response was that 68% of the respondents were age 50 or over, whereas only 32% of the total population falls into that age category. Therefore, more older people tended to answer the survey than younger persons. Despite the higher older person response rate, 62% of the respondents were employed and thus the response is not entirely biased toward retirees.

The survey greatly influenced the Plan's design. The survey reinforced the perceptions gained by the Local Planning Committee and the consulting team at the public workshops. The key findings from the survey are the following:

1. The Town's most important qualities are rural character, the ocean, bay, and a low tax structure.
2. The most severe problems to be addressed are coastal water pollution and coastal erosion.
3. The next layer of problems that respondents were most concerned about were tax increases and Route 6 traffic.
4. Respondents would welcome land uses similar to a new medical facility, a cultural facility, small businesses in the villages, and improvements to the Harbor.
5. Respondents would oppose uses similar to a fast food restaurant on Route 6, small factory outlet stores, and duplex housing.
6. The people who responded to the survey most fear commercial development, pollution, residential development and loss of scenic views as having the greatest potential to damage the Town's character.
7. Respondents would support greater funding for conservation, planning, harbor facilities and libraries. The most needed services cited were a youth center, public transit, senior housing and affordable housing.
8. Respondents resoundingly turned down the idea of providing more shopping opportunities in Truro. They don't mind driving.

The Truro Public Workshops

A series of six public workshops were held over the course of the Plan's preparation. The first workshop (March 5, 1992) inventoried the public on their concerns for the future and what should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. The Plan addressed every issue brought up at this meeting.

The second workshop was held in the summer of 1992 and it reviewed a draft vision statement with the public. Using the vision statement as a springboard, the group explored the general qualities that make Truro desirable and that should be protected into the future. This Plan's vision statement expresses the results of this workshop.

The third workshop (March 25, 1993) focused on identifying the special locations and the key problem locations in Truro. Small group mapping identified people's primary concerns and helped them define their vision for the future. The Air Force Base produced a mixed reaction as to whether it should be reused or demolished. Beach parking and access were seen by all as problems that must be addressed. Concerns on the potential for change along Route 6 and Beach Point were discussed. The importance of protecting rural character was a theme that ran through the entire evening. The sentiments and concerns from this workshop can be found in each of the elements of this Plan.

The next workshop (May 27, 1993) was directed at defining potential futures for the villages of Truro Center and North Truro. "No change" was the main message from this session, although the group explored a variety of ways to enhance the villages through improved circulation, better marketing, potential historic district creation and small business promotion. The "no change in our villages" message from this workshop strongly shaped the recommendations of this Plan.

The fifth workshop focused on the beaches and on coastal problems. A key finding from this workshop was the degree to which the seemingly opposed "ORVers" and the "naturalists" were in agreement on 90% of the coastal issues. Enforcement of existing bylaws was seen as a critical need by both sides. The exchanges helped each side see the other's positions.

The final workshop looked at Route 6. The group defined a set of standards for what would make a Route 6 business appealing and this effort laid the groundwork for the recommendations concerning the need for improved site design standards along Route 6, balanced with heavy participation by property owners. These standards are included in the community character element.

Town Vision and Growth Policy

The following statement expresses the visions of residents and property owners of Truro for how their community should grow and what it should be like into the future. In particular, it emphasizes the aspects of the Town that must be protected in order to maintain the rural character of this community. This statement is an expression of the positions and concerns that arose from the Plan's public participation process.

On Truro's Character

Truro will continue to be a rural town. Although we know that more houses will be built and more people will come in the years ahead, we will work to preserve our "small town-ness". We must ensure that future housing and business development preserve the sense of tranquillity that both Truro residents and visitors value. The key to achieving this goal will be low density development and unobtrusive buildings that protect the critical open spaces and scenic beauty of the beaches, harbor, river, moors, ponds, tree-lined roads and dunes. We will encourage property owners to think carefully about how their projects affect the character of the Town. What is built today will be with us for many, many years.

On Environmental Protection

We will encourage newcomers to respect the casual, diverse mix of people and building designs that we have in this Town. We will also encourage the common sense protection of the environment. Our tourism and marine economies, our water supply and our quality of life depend on protecting the natural beauty and environmental health of this Town. We will not let this be compromised. Truro must have strong environmental protection regulations to ensure that the natural environment is protected for generations to come. We will not become like so many other coastal communities; we will not be over built.

On Route 6 and Beach Point

Route 6 is the face that our Town presents to outsiders, but it has a character that is different from much of the rest of Town. Future development and reuse along this road must protect the Town's rural character.

Beach Point is another area that has a character different from the rural parts of our town. Beach Point has developed into a successful lodging area, and we want to encourage the healthy continuation of this neighborhood into the future. We do not wish, however, for additional motel development to stretch further into North Truro.

On Village Centers
We want to encourage businesses that will strengthen Truro's rural character. People visiting our Town in the future will find Truro Center and North Truro to be thriving hamlets.

On Employment
While protecting our rural character is of utmost importance to us, we also recognize that the broader economy in which we live has changed. It is becoming more and more difficult for young people from Truro to find local jobs, especially year-round jobs. Some of our residents will work from their homes or in local businesses, but many will drive elsewhere to find work. The Upper Cape is becoming more and more developed and more jobs are available in that area. Soon, Truro will be within a one hour commute of more jobs than ever before.

We accept that Truro will probably never be a place that offers a job for every resident, but we must consider how to find a balance between protecting our rural, natural character and offering opportunities for small businesses. We will encourage residents who create small businesses that fit into our rural character.

On Affordable Housing
Truro will be a place that offers housing choice to its natives. We are a small Town and cannot take care of the affordable housing needs of surrounding communities, but we will work to make some housing more affordable for those who grow up here or have spent significant portions of their lives in our Town.

On Town Services
As more people come to Truro, we recognize that we must provide quality Town services, but we are also committed to keeping our public services and the associated costs in line with the rural character that we seek to preserve. Living in a rural town means giving up many of the conveniences of suburban life.

On the National Seashore
The National Seashore provides us with a large supply of open space forever and thus supports the overall character that we wish to protect. We will continually work with the National Park Service to improve our communications and joint planning with this government body.

On Historic Resources

We will work cooperatively with private property owners to protect the historic buildings and sites of our Town. This will be an important part of offering to our descendants the Town character we love today and also enhancing our appeal to tourists.

Future generations will know that our 1990's planning efforts were a success if there is a cooperative effort between residents and the business community to shape a small town with a vibrant small scale economy that functions in a well protected, healthy environment.

We will have succeeded, if people can, for as long as they wish, come to Truro to "get away from it all."

Truro's Definition of Rural Character

Throughout this Plan, the central theme of importance for protecting Truro's future will be protecting the Town's rural character. The Historic Preservation and Community Character Element of this Plan defines rural character for Truro and, given the importance of this topic to each element of the Plan, that definition is presented here.

In every workshop and in the public survey, in every committee meeting and in every interview, the most important aspect of Truro's character that residents want to protect is the Town's rural feel. The Vision Statement expressed by this Plan emphasizes rural character. The workshops facilitated by this Plan and following discussion attempt to define what it is that makes up Truro's rural character and thus provides a foundation for this Plan's approach to rural character protection.

This Plan defines rural character as follows:

Those qualities of a town's *landscape, buildings, pace of life* and *attitude toward self* that make the place feel distant from urban and suburban American life. Of critical importance to Truro's rural character is maintaining a balance wherein nature is always more evident than people.

Rural character makes itself felt in many ways in Truro.

The *rural landscape* is evident through the open views of the water and hillsides, the presence of highly wooded areas along all roads, the few remaining open fields and the wildness of the moors in the National Seashore.

Rural buildings are connected with the natural environment, not separated from it. In Truro, this means that lawns blend in with the surrounding pitch pine and dunes; expansive lush green lawns are not a part of the natural environment in Truro. Buildings are kept low to the ground, they do not project high in the air. In a place of high winds and blowing sand, this is a time-honored tradition. Building color and design should allow the surrounding landscape to be enhanced rather than be muted or dominated.

A *rural pace of life* is evident in a certain amount of inefficiency in the road system and in the scale of Town services. It may take a little longer to travel from one place to another because the roads are a little rough or there are no traffic lights to make intersections efficient. Parking at the Post Office on a Saturday morning may be difficult because the parking lot is designed for the average midweek or midwinter number of customers, not for all the people who

come for a month or two in the summer. There are no major shopping facilities. Jobs are often seasonal or natural resource based. All of these qualities define a rural pace of life.

Finally, Truro's *rural attitude toward self* is expressed in what Truro residents want their community to be today and in the future. It is expressed in what they expect from Town government and in what they all acknowledge are the responsibilities of the individual. As stated in the Plan's vision, Truro will not provide government services as in many suburbs; people coming to Truro must accept that they must do more for themselves than might be necessary in other more developed towns. Truro's attitude toward itself is also expressed in the importance of protecting the environment. People love Truro for its open spaces and this is often more important for people than whether there are shopping malls nearby. Truro is also closely connected with the bay and the ocean. People in Truro must always have easy access to the water.

Therefore, the protection of Truro's rural character must involve the protection of each of these elements: landscape, buildings, pace of life and attitude toward self. Without protecting the landscape and buildings, a place will not look rural, it will lose its physical connection to the past. Protection of the buildings and landscape without the latter elements (pace of life and attitude towards self) produces a fake rural town. Both avenues of protection must be pursued.

In summary, Truro's philosophy toward planning is perhaps best summarized by the following quote from Edward McMahon of the conservation Fund: "Growth is inevitable. The destruction of community character that so often accompanies growth is not"

Truro's Local Planning Committee invites your written or verbal comments.

We shall hold hearings at the Truro Central School on:
Thursday, September 22nd at 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, October 13th at 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, October 29th at 10:00 a.m.

Several copies of the plan are at the Pilgrim Library, Cobb Library and at Town Hall.

If you would like to order your own copy, please contact Betsey Brown.

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